



Introduction of the Puerto Rico Democracy Act of 2009
1334 Longworth House Office Building
U.S. Congress
Washington, DC
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Good morning and welcome.

Today is a great day for Puerto Rico, a day filled with promise. As I pledged to do during my campaign for this office, I am introducing a bill that will authorize a fair, impartial and democratic process of self-determination on the Island. Pursuant to this legislation, called the Puerto Rico Democracy Act of 2009, the United States Congress will formally consult the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico regarding their preferred political status for the first time in 111 years. I am grateful—and humbled—that this bill is supported by over 80 original co-sponsors from both political parties, including the Democratic Majority Leader, the

Chairman of the House Republican Conference, and the top-ranking Democrat or Republican on eight key congressional committees and over 30 subcommittees. I want to say a special thank you to my colleagues who have taken time away from their busy schedules to join me at the podium this morning. While they come from different political parties and different parts of the country, they share in common a deep love for Puerto Rico and its people—and a fierce determination to see that the Island’s residents are treated fairly.

The bill I have introduced today is simple and it is fair. It first authorizes the government of Puerto Rico to conduct a plebiscite. Voters will be asked whether they wish to maintain Puerto Rico’s present form of political status or whether they wish to have a different political status. If a majority of voters cast their ballots in favor of a different political status, the government of Puerto Rico will be authorized to conduct a second plebiscite among three options: independence, statehood, and sovereignty in association with the United States.

The bill does not exclude any status option, and it does not favor any status option. It enables the people of Puerto Rico to express their wishes regarding the Island's political status in a series of democratic votes. It will thus ensure that the views of all the people are heard on this fundamental question. The results of these votes will be certified to the President and to Congress.

I am optimistic that this bill will receive a fair hearing in committee, that it will be brought up for a vote before the full House, and that it will ultimately be approved by this chamber with strong bipartisan support. I am likewise confident that the Senate, having witnessed these events in the House, will also approve the bill. And I believe that President Obama, who has promised to address the question of Puerto Rico's status within his first term in office, will sign the bill with pride when it reaches his desk.

I am under no illusion that any of this will be easy. But nothing truly worth doing ever is. To achieve a successful result, I will work closely with my colleagues—including those leaders in Puerto Rico and those members of Congress who love

the Island as much as I do but whose vision for its future differs from my own. Where compromise is fair and appropriate, I will be willing to compromise. Where it is not, I will not. In all that I do, I will be guided by a single goal: to deliver to the people of Puerto Rico what they deserve and what they have waited so long for—the right to be heard.

Thank you.